



Twelfth Night: From Shakespeare Stories by Leon Garfield

William Shakespeare

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The story which furnishes the plot of this comedy is to be found in various degrees of development in the writings of various Italian and French novelists and dramatists of the sixteenth century. Of these a comedy called *GV I ngannati* (*T he Mistaken Ones*), first printed in 1537, by an unknown author, is most like *Twelfth Night*, to which, indeed, it corresponds in plot almost point for point. Such knowledge, however, as Shakespeare had of *GV I ngannati* was, we may be sure, through some English translation, or some play founded upon it, which has been lost. The principal serious incidents of his own play he might have found in *Apollonius and Silla*, the second of a collection of tales published by Barnaby Rich, in 1581 ;but from whatever quarter he took these, there can be no doubt that he himself added the inferior comic personages, and worked their doings up with those of their enamored superiors. *Twelfth Night* was first printed in the folio of 1623 ;but the contemporary diary of John Manningham, a student of the Middle Temple, in London, records its performance in the Temple hall on the 2d February, 1601-2. As Meres does not mention it in 1598, we may be sure that it was written about 1599-1600. It is printed in the folio with a remarkable degree of correctness. There is little doubt as to any important passage in its text ;and none, I believe, has ever been expressed as to the authorship of any part of it. We feel the gentle touch of Shakespeare's gentlest hand in it, from the first scene to the last. As to the period of the action and the costume, there is a delightful uncertainty ;but in regard to other points, an equally delightful certainty. Whoever the Duke of Illyria or Sebastian of Mitylene may be, Toby Belch, Andrew Aguecheek, Malvolio, Fabian, and Maria are English men and women of Shakespeare's own day. As to them we may be sure ;and let the uncertainty be.

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